

# Han Bennink



## Han die kan der wat van!?

(Analysis on his musical-style)

Tijn Jans, jazz drums, 2013

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Name: Tijn Jans

Place: Amsterdam

Date: 25 February 2013

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# Index

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<b>Preface</b>	4
<b>The Plan</b>	6
- Hypothesis	
- How am I going to find out?	
- Why did I choose these Recordings?	
<b>Music and Live</b>	13
- His Youth	
- Han gets the Gigs	
- ICP and New music	
- The Hype is over, ICP orchestra is born	
- Han Bennink Soloist	
<b>Analyses</b>	21
- #1 Sound Concept	
- #2 Energy	
- #3 Theatre Elements	
- #4 Tradition	
- #5 Technique	
- #6 Story Telling	
- #7 Fluxus	
<b>Epilogue</b>	38
- What did I learn from this?	
- Discography	
- Bibliography	
<b>Appendixes</b>	
- CD with sound samples	
- Transcriptions	
- CD with video material of Han Bennink	

# Preface

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## **Question: Is there something like a Han Bennink Sound? Or what makes Han Bennink sound like Han Bennink?**

I heard Han Bennink for the first time on a record called *The Itch* by Benjamin Herman, a Dutch alto sax player. The first thing that caught my attention was that I could only hear a snare drum, no bass drums or no cymbals at all in the whole record. I heard a lot of different textures going on and the whole record was not sounding boring although you could only hear a snare drum. After hearing it a few times I checked who was playing drums on the record and it was Han Bennink and I thought: 'this guy plays incredible on only a snare drum, what a sound!'

### Sound

If I am talking about that a drummer 'sounds great', I am talking about the actual sound that the drummer makes on the drum set. But I am also referring to his groove, his timing, his timbre, his musicality, etc. I could say his sound is the way he reflects the music.

The sound that a person can create on an instrument is very personal. It doesn't matter if you take a professional musician or an amateur. Every individual plays an instrument in a different way although they maybe have the same technique or the same strings or even the same instrument, the sound of the instrument will be different every time. You can see this when you look at large ensembles in classical music. Most of the time you can find different versions or performances of the same piece or composition by great composers like Bach and Mozart. But people will prefer certain versions to others just because they sound different or better. The variation in sound of the versions can be explained because of the fact that different people are playing the same music.

When people speak or sing it's most of the time very clear that everybody sounds different. But even if we look closer to a single instrument played by two people, they will not sound the same. If I hit a key of the piano and somebody else would hit exactly the same key on the same piano it will not sound the same. Maybe this is because the person has a slightly different weight that he puts into the key so that it resonates a little more. Or perhaps his hand is just a little bit heavier, or his finger is a little thicker and slightly hits the other key. It will never sound exactly the same.

The difference between a professional and an amateur musician is not only the physical differences; it's also the fact that a professional musician has studied many hours on getting a good sound out of the instrument. He or she also has listened and played a lot of music and therefore has more knowledge about sound than the amateur.

Han Bennink recorded over 200 albums in his musical career and toured all over the world. So there must be something about his sound that musicians and audiences like. So my question is what makes Han Bennink sound so great? What is his sound? Can I analyse that?

# The Plan

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## Hypothesis

### **Han Bennink Sound**

A great part of Han Bennink's sound is Han being himself, being a person. This is what I call: the natural sound of the individual. The other part of the sound is built on technique, style, experiences and emotions in life, taste, etc. as explained in the preface. The first part we can't analyse but most of this second part we can. We can put labels on things like technique, skins, timbre, sticks, cymbals, emotions, life experiences, movement, phrases, traditions, etc. All these aspects create the second part of the sound. And this we can analyse.

I chose to look at the 'Han Bennink sound' from the following points:

- Sound Concept (instrumentation)
- Energy
- Theatre elements
- Tradition
- Technique
- Story telling
- Fluxus

### **Sound Concept (Instrumentation):**

Sound is one of the key words that come to mind when I think of Han Bennink. He has a very special sound. It's not the same sound as Bill Stewart for instance. Bill has a special way of tuning the drums and always uses the same heads so he can get the same sound out of any drum kit.

But in Han Bennink's case it's different. He usually just plays on whatever he gets in front of him. He has a great ear for different sounds and the precision to execute them when he wants them to be there.

### **Energy:**

The second aspect that's very important is his energy. Han Bennink has a tremendous amount of energy that you can feel when you are listening to him and see when he's performing.

### **Theatre elements:**

Han Bennink has a special connection with the audience. First of all he looks curious: He is a big guy (almost two meters) and wears army boots and a handkerchief strapped around his head. Second thing that you can see right away when he starts playing is the expression on his face. The third thing is that he often starts talking to the audience in the middle of a tune, or starts to sing a melody while he is accompanying himself. He makes funny gestures to the audience or starts to scream. He is always looking for some way to connect with the audience, with his instrument and without.

### **Tradition:**

If you played music from 1950-1960 in Europe, you would probably be playing jazz music. Bebop, Swing and later Modern Jazz were the pop music of that period. You could

see it all over Europe; the music from America was the bible. Han Bennink, born in 1944, definitely got exposed to it at a very young age. Although his playing seems to change during his career, I will probably find traces of traditional bebop/jazz drumming in his playing.

**Technique:**

Another thing that immediately grabs your attention when you hear Han Bennink is the incredible speed of his notes. He can play really fast phrases. So he must have a really good technique. I will try to find traces of this as well.

**Story telling:**

Storytelling is very present in Han Bennink's playing. He always has very strong beginnings and endings. All his lines are little questions and answers that work together to form a bigger story. Maybe it's not always clear or coherent but he always grabs your attentions with what he is playing.

**Fluxus:**

I wonder if a certain movement called Fluxus also influenced his playing. This movement, established around 1964, had a main purpose: to go against all the art forms that were established at that time. Han Bennink played with Misha Mengelberg and Peter Brötzmann who were people that played on Fluxus meetings and events. I think that you can find a lot of influences from the Fluxus movement in his playing.

## How am I going to find out?

After reading his biography *De Wereld als Trommel*, I made a small timeline of Han Bennink's life and pin pointed moments where his playing changed or developed. Then I took out the ensembles/bands he played in during these periods. From the ensembles/bands I took the ones where he played in for a long period of time (5 years or more).

I thought that I could find more traces of his personality in ensembles/bands that he played in over a long period of time. In the temporary bands or improvised sessions he would not be himself. His playing would be different in a regular band than if he would do a single session with a band or a musician.

Then I took one album from each of these ensembles/bands and made my little discography that reflects Han Bennink's development threw his career:

- Misha Mengleberg/Piet Noordijk Quartet *Journey*, 1966
- The new Acoustic Swing Duo *ICP 001*, 1967
- Brötzmann, Bennink, van Hoven *FMP130*, 1973
- Han Bennink *Tempo Comodo*, 1982
- Trio Clusone *An Hour with...* 2000
- Han Bennink Trio *Bennink & Co*, 2012

I will attempt to find examples of the seven points from the hypothesis on these records. I will look for two clear examples of every point (total 14 examples). These examples will be expressed in four different forms:

- Verbally (detailed descriptions)
- Transcriptions (transcribed drum parts)
- Music examples (audio material)
- Video examples (video material)



## Why did I choose these recordings?

**CD:** Misha Mengelberg/Piet Noordijk Quartet ft. Ted Curson

**Recorded:** Live at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, 1966

**Personel:** Misha Mengelberg, Piet Noordijk, Rob Langereis, Han Bennink and Ted Curson.



I chose this record because it documents Han Bennink playing in his early years. This recording was made when he was 24 years old. We hear the quartet in excellent shape, after working together for four years, and we can hear that Han Bennink is heavily inspired by the great American musicians of the time.

If you take a look at the compositions by Ted Curson (*The Leopard*, *Sugar N' Spice*) and *Driekusman Total Loss* by Misha Mengelberg you can see the influences clearly. These tunes sound like American jazz standards. The horns play a melody, in the middle part of the song are the solos and in the end we hear a reprise of the melody to finish the song. We can hear the bass walks in four, sometimes in two during the head (opening melody). The piano comps the soloist and most of the solos are on the form (AABA, or something similar), the chord structure of the melody.

On this record we can hear the roots of Han Bennink's playing very clearly. He plays a swinging cymbal pattern and accompanies the soloist with hits on the snare and the bass drum like in the bebop jazz drumming tradition.

**CD:** ICP 001, New Acoustic Swing Duo

**Recorded:** Felix Meritus, Amsterdam, Holland, 1967

**Personel:** Han Bennink, Willem Breuker



On this record you can clearly hear a change in Han Bennink's playing. First of all the CD is a duo recording of only saxophone and drums/percussion. This fact is already moving away from the traditional setting we were in one year ago on the Mengelberg quartet

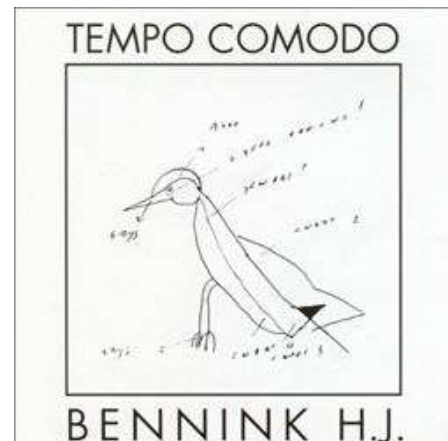
record. This was the first recording of the duo but both players had known each other for a while from playing together in Mengelberg's band. Secondly is the way the duo plays together. There are no clear melodies and solo's on a form, there are just conversations between drums and saxophone.

They play together and some times on their own. They are trying to react and interact with each other. Chattering sax lines accompanied by roaring drums and sometimes: soft tablas accompanied by a bass clarinet. On this record you can really hear the beginning of the big avant-garde period in Holland.

**CD:** Tempo Comodo, Han Bennink

**Recorded:** in a barn in Loenen, Holland, 1982

**Personel:** Han Bennink



Review of **Tempo Comodo** by Thom Jurek. Thom Jurek is musical reviewer from Detroit. His reviews, interviews, and articles have appeared in magazines and journals including Rolling Stone, Cream, Musician, Spin, American Songwriter, Paste, Interview, The Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, and Rock and Rap Confidential

*There are very few drummers who could pull off a solo percussion record in the same way that Han Bennink does: playfully. His long reach into the hallmarks of rhythmic invention displays itself here in a myriad of ways -- certainly on the trap kit, the instrument on which he has so few peers, but also on gongs, cymbals, hand drums, found objects, selected surfaces, and even in the air! In nuanced execution (whether it be rowdy as a barroom fight or subtle as a whisper), Bennink reveals over the course of these 15 selections the many ways in which he can make the drums (or whatever else he's using as drums) sing. Song becomes the dais on which his entire percussion workshop turns, offering humor and outrageous feats of both artistry and chaos, as well as a sense of vaudevillian performance ethos, inside the framework of his improvisational monologue. There are many surprises here, none of them remotely tedious or ordinary. In fact, if anything, Tempo Comodo comes off as a work of singularity and alchemical transformation from percussion workshop to a statement on the creation and foundation of the rhythmic principle. This album is more than a wonder -- in fact, it's a delight. <sup>1</sup>*

I chose this recording because it's the last piece of three solo albums Han Bennink recorded in the period from 1970 till 1982. This was the period where he was really

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Internet, All music

interested in different sounds. He had a barn full of percussion and all kinds of material he was playing and practicing on.

You can clearly hear this on the record. We can hear stones, things sweeping in the air, brushes, drums, pots and pans, timbales, timpani and you can even hear him clap, humming and scream. Everything that is capable of making a sound is on there.

This album is a highpoint of Han Bennink's search for sound. After this period (from 1990 on) he returned to the drum set with some additions.

**CD:** Clusone trio, an Hour with...

**Recorded:** Studio Hadoligy, Belgium, 2000

**Personel:** Michael Moore, Ernst Reijssiger and Han Bennink



The Clusone trio was formed in 1988 and stayed together for almost a decade. Han Bennink played a lot with this band in this period as well as the ICP Orchestra. The ICP Orchestra was born out of the record company that Han Bennink and Mengelberg started in 1968 called ICP (Instant Composers Pool). After making duo/solo and small ensemble records with improvisers from all over Europe Bennink and Mengelberg decided to form a large band with a rhythm section and horns, this became the ICP Orchestra.

Han Bennink and Ernst Reijssiger grew up together and he knows Michael Moore from the ICP. He formed this band because he got a card blanche at an Italian jazz festival in a place called Clusone.

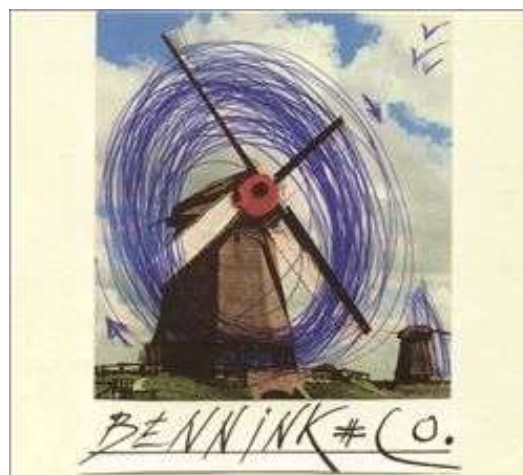
In this band we hear Han Bennink go back to the classic drum set. He doesn't play this huge set up anymore. He plays on a drum set with only some small percussion on the side.

The repertoire is chosen by Han Bennink and goes back to his childhood. We can here the trio performing jazz standards combined with world music songs. They mix or connect them with free improvisations, the key element in his life. They have a very organic way of playing together.

**CD:** Han Bennink Trio, Bennink & CO

**Recorded:** Live at Jazz Case Dommelhof, Neerpelt, Belgium 2011

**Personel:** Joachim Badenhorst, Simon Toldam and Han Bennink



This CD is one of the latest recordings of Han Bennink. In John Corbert's *Extended Play* (1993) I found a quote of Han Bennink saying that there will never again be something like the Han Bennink Trio. It has existed since 2006 and this is their second album.

The trio started as a duo with Simon Toldam and Han Bennink. They knew each other from a music course in Canada. After that they made a duo tour in Denmark in 2005. The year after that Han Bennink asked Joachim Badenhorst, who was also there at the music workshop in Canada, to join them for some concerts in Holland. Since then they played as a trio.

On this recording Han Bennink is only playing snare drum. He goes back to the basics, back to his childhood when he only had a snare drum. The band consisting out of drums, piano and a horn player also reminds me of his roots. I have some of his first recordings when he was 15. He is playing here together with a piano player and his father on clarinet. This is exactly the same ensemble.

The tunes are songs by Badenhorst and Toldam combined with standards from the American songbook. These tunes are again connected or interrupted by free improvisations.

# Music and Live<sup>2</sup>

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## Han in a Nutshell

(A small biography)

### His Youth

Han Bennink was born on April 17, 1942 in Zaandam- a small town nearby Amsterdam, Holland. He probably got into music the first day he was born, because his father, Rein Bennink, was a hard working musician. He played drums and percussion in various dancing bands and later on, when they moved to Hilversum, in radio orchestras. Besides that he played the clarinet and alto sax in different small ensembles.

Han Bennink played on chairs and tables with the used drumsticks that his father gave him after his rehearsals. At the age of 10 he gets his first snare drum made by his father. *'I never had a complete drum kit'* Han Bennink recalls, *'We simply didn't have enough money to buy a whole drum kit'*.

At the age of 12 Han Bennink joined his father's Zaaiers rehearsals at the AVRO studios in Hilversum. This orchestra that made music for various TV and radio shows and sometimes accompanied international guests. Sometimes he played a little with his father and some members of the orchestra or he played along with the orchestra on a tambourine. By this time he also made his first appearance in front of an audience. He played a medley of twelve children songs on a harmonica at a performance night at his school.

In 1955 Rein convinced Gerard Harms, a sound guy at the AVRO studios, to make some recordings after a rehearsal. This was the first recording that Han Bennink made with his father on clarinet and Harms himself on piano. They played standards like *Blue Skies*, *Moonlight* and *Lady be Good* in the Benny Goodman style.

Han Bennink's fascination with wind instruments probably comes from his father. His father, besides being a good horn player was also very good at repairing these instruments. *'When I was young there were always instruments lying around, sometimes I would sneak up to some tenor sax and blow a little on it'*. Later on you can find Han Bennink playing sax, trombone and other wind instruments on records and performances. Although he got a sax from his father, drumming is Han Bennink's thing. That's why in 1958 he played his first gig with his father as an extra percussion player in a Latin band from Willy Langestraat.

In 1959 Rein Bennink and his orchestra were the main act at a Dutch army base in the south of France. Every summer the army would get some top class acts to entertain the troops. The 17-year-old Han Bennink goes along with his father because they have prepared an act together. They performed Benny Goodman's *Sing Sing Sing*, Han Bennink on drums and his father on clarinet. When they arrive the skin of the drum is broken because of the heat. *'No worries, Han, you can just play on the floor'*, says his

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<sup>2</sup> Source: *De Wereld als Trommel*, Erik van den Berg (Han's Dutch Biography), *New Dutch Swing*, Kevin Whitehead.

dad, and so he did. *'From this moment on I knew that you could drum on everything'*, he recalls.

Besides being a percussion player in the orchestra Rein Bennink was well known as a session musician and got a lot of phone calls for small gigs besides the orchestra. That's why it was an easy step for Han Bennink to start playing gigs with his father at the end of the 1950's. But their collaborations ended in 1960 because Han Bennink started to develop a strong musical taste of his own.

Han Bennink inherited his physical strength and endless energy from his mother. Anna Melk, his mother, was the daughter of Piet Melk a wrestler from Zaandam that almost went to the Olympic games of 1912 in Stockholm, Sweden. She loved to swim and play sports. Han Bennink would be by riding the bike, ice-skating and rowing the rest of his life trying to loose some steam. You can also see this energy when he is performing.

### Han gets the gigs

In 1960 Han Bennink doesn't pass for his high School diploma because he cheated during the exam. However, he received a recommendation letter from his art teacher. With this letter he went to the Kunstniverheid School in Amsterdam, later to become the Rietveld Art Academy, and gets accepted. After the first year he specialized in graphics. We can see his love for drawing and creating in many of his cover drawings for his records.

He never had any drum lessons. His father wanted him to learn how to read music and got him a drum lesson with Karel Wurcherd. Han didn't like Karel's approach so he walked out during the first lesson. But the fact that Han couldn't read didn't hold him back doing a lot of gigs and also gigs where you should be able to read. *'I would just look at the piano player and when he turned the page I also turned mine, nobody noticed the difference'*.

In 1961, one of these gigs got him work on a cruise ship that would sail to New York in the USA. He played with a cocktail trio and a singer on the ship in the restaurant. Besides Dutch drummers like John Engels, Cees See and Wessel Ilcken Han loves American drummers. Jazz was born in America so everything that came from there was great. On his first trip to America, he would return twice, he saw Elvin Jones with Coltrane, Roy Haynes with Monk and Charnet Moffet with Eric Dolphy. But his all time favourite then and still, Kenny Clark, he saw in Amsterdam.

Through his connections and gigs he met Misha Mengelberg. They played their first gig together on February 4<sup>th</sup> 1960 in Perspolis in Utrecht. From this moment on they played together until today. Misha recalls, *'After Han was back from New York he really sounded different. Now he could really play!'* Han Bennink and Misha Mengelberg founded a quartet with alto sax player Piet Noordijk. This band toured and played threw Holland but their high point was the invitation to play at the New Port Jazz festival in USA in 1966.

In the same period he meets Ruud Jacobs a young bass player. This connection will bring Han Bennink the gigs with all the great American stars of that era. Ruud's brother Pim is a great, young piano player in the Hilversum area. He becomes a host for a Dutch TV series called 'Djezz zien'. This show allows him to bring great American stars over to Holland and then play with them in his TV show. Pim and Ruud formed the accompanying band and asked Han bennink to join them. Beside the TV show they would organise a small tour in clubs in Holland. Han Bennink had his first encounter

with Johnny Griffin in 1963, he played with Eric Dolphy in 1964 and recorded together with Mengelberg *Last Date*. This was one of the last recordings of Dolphy before he died. Besides these two encounters he played in 1965 with the Misha Mengelberg/Piet Noordijk quartet with Ted Curson as a guest on trumpet. In the same year he performed again with Johnny Griffin and in 1966 he played with Booker Ervins.

Han Bennink started to change his playing during this period. *'When I heard Milford Graves in 1965 with all his rattles and African percussion I started to think more about sound with strange cymbals and different drums.'* He starts to play more open solos and he starts breaking up the time playing during the period with the Misha Mengelberg quartet.

The quartet briefly becomes a quintet in 1966 with young alto player Willem Breuker. Han Bennink and Misha Mengelberg met this ambitious guy in the Amsterdam jazz scene. Breuker played the opposite way to Piet at that time. His broken 'non swinging' way of playing conflicted with the bebop/hard bop style of Noordijk but it contributes to the way Mengelberg wants that his compositions sound. Han Bennink asks Breuker to join him at an opening concert of his first solo exhibition on 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1966 in Amsterdam. In December 1966 after Misha has won the Wissel Ilcken prize the collaboration between Noordijk and Misha stops. After the concert, where Bennink was playing on big bells, Misha was lighting firecrackers and Willem was playing low undefined rumbles on his bass clarinet, Noordijk quit the band and didn't play with them anymore till years later.

The theatre elements, jokes and other weird stuff on stage came from a movement in the early 60's called Fluxus. This art movement had its roots in Dadaism and heavily inspired Misha Mengelberg during these years. Together with writer/poet Wim T. Schippers he played on the first Fluxus happenings in Holland. Han Bennink who played a lot with Mengelberg during this period didn't got that heavily into Fluxus. He recalls that he was too young: *'During that period I was still making watercolours at the Kunstnijverheid school.'* Although he wasn't into Fluxus, this is the period where he starts his voyage into sound and starts to play looser time than earlier.

The 60's where roaring years all over the world. In these times the scene in Holland splits itself in two. On one side we have the avantgarde/Fluxus scene and on the other, the traditional preserving jazz scene. Han was involved with both. He would play one night with Pim Jacob's wife, lady of Dutch jazz Rita Reys, and then the other night free with Willem Breuker. People started to call him a traitor as he turned his back on playing time and traditional swing music. Han Bennink and Pim Jacobs were very good friend but for Han there friendship just drifted a part. *'I just started to quit the commercial gigs little by little when I could make money with my own stuff.'* Han played his last gig with the Pim Jacobs trio with Hank Mobley on a TV show in 1968. After this, their collaborations stopped.

After New York, West Berlin is the second really big city Han encounters. In 1964 He travels along with Dutch trumpeter Ack van Rooyen who was playing in the big band from Sender Freies Berlin. He gets an engagement with American alto player Herb Geller who was in the same big band. After this the first Berliner Jazztage Jazztage takes place and Han Bennink meets a lot of young players during the festival and gets connected with people who will later give him a lot of work in Germany. He sees Tony William play, meets Joe Morello and meets up with Johnny Griffin and sits in for his drummer Art Taylor for the last set at the Blue Note club in Berlin. After the last jam session at an informal Jazzball Han has supper with Dave Brubeck at Herb Geller's house.



He meets up with Dave Brubeck in 1967 when the Misha Mengelberg quartet with Willem Breuker plays as a starter before Brubeck at the festival of Antibes/Juan-les-Pins in the south of France. Critics don't like the new music of the quartet and they don't receive the title 'the best Combo of Europe', which the Pim Jacobs Trio with Rita Reys got in 1960 at the festival. *'The only guy who liked it was Dave Brubeck, he saw the whole show from his balcony and came afterwards to talk with us.'*

The critics in Holland also had their different opinions on the new music of Bennink and Breuker. Regarding a concert in Zaandam of the Willem Breuker Orchestra in 1967 the Zaanse newspaper says: 'every jazz club in Holland should restrict this musical madness from their stages', on the other hand, Martin Schouten in *Jazzwereld* wrote: *'a nice happening of half an hour, the most sympathetic and funniest Breuker manifest I ever saw.'*

Despite the criticism on Han Bennink's new, free way of playing he still gets called to play with American guests. With Cees Slinger on piano instead of Pim Jacobs, he accompanies Ben Webster, Don Byas and Buddy Tate in 1967 in a place called Arti. In the same year he plays a duet on tablas with Nina Simone who was invited to sing with the Boy Edgar big band in Holland. But the ultimate challenge took place at the end of this year where he played a tour with Sonny Rollins.

At the end of 1967 the opinions about Han Bennink are like black and white: people hate him or love him. Despite this he gets the Wissel Ilcken prize, the most important jazz prize in Holland at that time. Misha Mengelberg got it the year before. During the same time a documentary is shown on national television called *de Bezetene* (the possessed). The documentary is about Han Bennink and shows his daily life and interviews with American guest like Webster, friends of Han Bennink and fellow musicians. In the movie we can see Han and a band called the Dixie Stork Kids, a party band that played for festivals and accompanied entertainment artists. He was now playing for good money. We see the band making jokes after the show about the avant-garde scene, he replies on the camera: 'I would rather play something else than this commercial shit music.' After the movie was released his life as a session musician was definitely over. He didn't have to show up anymore for rehearsals with the Dixie Kid's.

### ICP and New Music

In 1967 Bennink, Mengelberg and Breuker joined forces and started their own record company. They wanted to make their own music and organize their own concerts and make their own records. The Instant Composers Pool was born. The first record, the duo of Bennink and Breuker called *The new Acoustic Swing Duo*, ICP 001 was recorded in 1967 and Han made 500 unique illustrations on the 500 LP's. They were sold within 10 weeks after the release concert. This was the first one of the more than 50 records that the company made up till now (2013).

Because it was a Pool the concerts were never with the same people. They invited various guests on their concert and made new bands and groups with there European connections. Improvisers from Germany, England and France were added to the Pool during the coming years. Breuker quit the pool at an early stage (1973) because of conflicts with Misha and sets up his own collective called *the Willem Breuker Kollektief*. The contact between Misha and Willem stops but the contact with Han stays.

At the end of the 60's the flower power of the 70's already kicks in with a performance of the Charles Lloyd quartet in Scheveningen, Holland. *Hitweek*, a teen magazine, writes an article about the coming show of Lloyd and asks his readers to show



up dressed with flowers. Together with the jazz critics a big group of teens in miniskirts and hippie clothing attended the psychedelic jazz concert of Lloyd's group. But before the audience gets to hear Lloyd, they get a short set of the trio, Mengelberg, Breuker and Han Bennink. Mengelberg uses some real fishing gear to fish in the string of his piano. The trio makes music that's destructive, loud, beautiful and filled with humour. The opposite of what the main act is going to do. In the same month avant-garde piano player Cecil Taylor comes to Holland. *Hitweek* doesn't write anything about it, because Cecil's music is hard and complicated and asks the audience to listen. Han meets him together with Breuker, Chris Hinze on flute and Dick van der Capellen on bass, in the AVRO studios in Hilversum. *'Cecil and me we didn't talk, we looked like we where about to kill each other. And then we made some great music; the drum set fell apart at the end. Brilliant!'* Despite this Han hits the popularity poll in *Hitweek*, the only jazz musician to do so in 1968. His name is among other upcoming Nederpop (Dutch pop music) artists.

In this year de Paradiso in Amsterdam becomes the centre where Jazz and Pop go hand in hand. Saxophonist Hans Dulfer is the key figure that made double bills with avant-garde jazz bands and pop acts. Han was a regular guest playing with Dulfer on these nights. The stage becomes very popular, at the high point one thousand visitors attended. One night the hippie scene listened to a duo: Han Bennink on tabla and a mystical young guy on guitar named: John McLaughlin.

On these nights he meets most of his future colleagues like Fred van Hoven and Peter Brötzmann. Because of this blend between pop and avantgarde music Bennink and Mengelberg get more gigs on more commercial events and pop festivals. This continues until 1970. In this year Bennink and Mengelberg played on a festivals together with Peter Brötzmann, but the audience is not very pleased. They don't want jazz they just want Jimmy Hendrix.

During the period from 1967 up to 1970 the political environment in Europe changes more to the left side. The avant-garde music scene was strongly politically based and grew a lot during this period. Han Bennink and Misha Mengelberg became key figures in the European Avant-garde music scene. They played with people like Peter Brötzmann, Evan Parker, Derek Bailey and Alexander von Schlippenbach. The connection with Germany, England and France becomes stronger because the musicians had the same ideas and the same constructed record companies like ICP. Misha and Han played on records of Peter Brötzmann's FMP and he would come and play on ICP. The same happened in England with Derek Bailey's company Incus Records: for example on ICP 004 duo Bailey/Bennink. You can find Han playing on the cult hit *Machine Gun*, FMP14 from Brötzmann. During this time period the improvisers would stay together and form bands. Han became a regular member of the trio with Peter Brötzmann and Belgium piano player Fred van Hoven. This band stays together from 1970 till 1976 when Fred leaves the band and Han Bennink and Brötzmann go on as a duo.

Han still played a lot with Willem Breuker in Holland and with Misha. Music Theater becomes very popular during this time in Holland. Misha and Breuker work together with writer Wim T. Schippers and make strong, political based, but most of all absurd music theatre. When Breuker leaves ICP in 1973 the Duo of Han and Misha becomes stronger again. Now everything is possible, from Thelonius Monk to *Moe daar ligt een kip in het water* (Dutch song), undefined noise and total theatre. The duo released seven records on ICP between 1971 and 1997, all in different forms: on LP, cassette and CD.

### The Hype is over, ICP Orchestra was born

From 1968 till 1993 Han Bennink lived in a barn that he bought not far from his home in Loenen aan de Vecht. The 90 square meter barn would slowly be filled with all kinds of percussion, cymbals, drums and other stuff that could make a sound. He took most of the stuff with him to gigs in a big Citroen van. Among this stuff was a really big bass drum, a three meter French alpine horn and some Chinese little drums and Tibetan cymbals. In these years Han experimented a lot and was searching for sounds. He recorded four solo records in the period from 1971 until 1982. One of the most exceptional records, if you look at sound, was *Schwartzwaldfahrt*, a duo recording with

Peter Brötzmann. On this record, which was recorded in the German forest, you can hear Han Bennink playing rhythms on the water. Other nice examples of his search are *Tempo comodo* 1982 and *Solo east/west* 1978 where he makes music with a typewriter.



*Han Bennink and his set-up with Peter Brötzmann (1973)*

In 1977 ICP celebrates its 10-year anniversary on a small camping site in Uithoorn with guests like Alexander von Schlippenbach and Derek Bailey. During the same time the International Jazz festival of Laren takes place with an American line-up.

This shows how far the ICP group was disconnected with the conventional jazz crowd. This is also the time when the ICP orchestra first forms. In the centre was Han and Misha expanded with four saxophonists (Bennink, Brötzmann, Ticai, van Bergijk), Tristan Holsinger on cello, Maarten van Regenter on bass and Michael Waisvisz on Kraakdoos (a self built synthesizer). The orchestra played with different line-ups over the next few years but became fixed in 1987. Michael Moore, Wolter Wierbos and Ab Baars became part of the team the orchestra became more defined. In the same year Ernst Glerum became the bass player and forms a strong tandem with Han Bennink that you can hear on many different records later on. The orchestra still exists today and has made about 7 records in the past 35 years.

The orchestra rehearsed every Monday in the old Bimhuis in Amsterdam. Misha wrote most of the material, maybe only a few bars, but there were rules. The way the orchestra improvised with the material was thoroughly planned. In 1980 the orchestra worked on material of Mengelberg's youth idols Herbie Nichols and Thelonius Monk. The record with this material allowed them to tour in the USA in 1986. Han Bennink changed his playing a little during this period. He tried to play softer and started to play a lot with brushes.

Although Han is not the first guy to get the call for a cocktail jazz gig, he still lives the double life between the avant-garde scene and the jazz scene. In 1973 he was asked to do a recording session with Lee Konitz, Gary Barts and Jackie Mclean in Copenhagen, because the producer is stuck with a sick drummer. The next day when he comes back he played an absurd music theatre piece together with Mengelberg. Or even more extreme: in 1988 he meets up with Cecil Taylor again for a concert during the Berlin Jazzfest and in the same week he played a little tour with soul singer Percy Sledge. *'Percy was stuck with a German band with a drummer that couldn't play. He heard me playing and asked me for the next three shows in Germany.'*

He started to play more often in theatre shows because Mengelberg and Wim T. Schippers were getting very successful in the 80's with their absurd theatre pieces. This is also the time where Han Bennink started to develop a more physical, expressive way of playing. He would play his drums with a big bamboo stick or light an actual fire in his Tibetan high hats. He would put his foot on the head of the drum to change the pitch of the sound.

Some of the people he worked with couldn't stand it anymore after a while. But most of the other players say that it's just a part of him that has to get out. Kevin Whitehead, author of the book called *New Dutch Swing*, says: *'just close your eyes and you will hear the music through all the jokes.'*

### Han Bennink soloist

In 1988, Han was invited to play at the Jazz festival in Clusone, Italy. He formed a band with cellist Ernst Reijseger and Michael Moore. This band would stay together for the following 10 years as the Clusone Trio. Han would pick most of the material this band played. Mostly jazz standards connected with free improvisations. The band was strong because every player had a strong identity and an urge to change the music. They made four records together.

During the 90's Han Bennink got a lot of positive comments when he appears on a swing record of tenor sax player Joep van Enkhuizen. People said that Han Bennink finally returned to swing again. He got very angry and said: *'it's not that simple, it's about*

*the possibilities. I can swing, sure, but there's so much more. It's sick that people think like this.'* He loved to do both.

Besides the ICP orchestra and the Trio Clusone Han got more and more solo work. He played solo concerts and workshops all over the world. If we take a look at his agenda in the spring of 2008: march 1<sup>st</sup> Budapest, march 3<sup>rd</sup> Oslo, march 6<sup>th</sup> Tromslø, march 7<sup>th</sup> Bergen, march 8<sup>th</sup> Trondheim, march 9 Inderøy, march 10<sup>th</sup> Stavanger, march 14-17<sup>th</sup> Paris, march 19<sup>th</sup> Gent, march 21<sup>st</sup> Rijksvoorstel, march 24<sup>th</sup> Vienna, march 25<sup>th</sup> Schwaz, march 26<sup>th</sup> Zurich, march 28<sup>th</sup> Amsterdam, march 29<sup>th</sup> Belfast, march 30<sup>th</sup> Dublin march 31<sup>th</sup> Cork, 1-4<sup>th</sup> april Antwerp, etc. During the period from 2000 until now he became more interested in playing only the snare drum. In 2000 he owned seven different snare drums and went on solo tours over the world he only takes one little snare drum with him and a bag of sticks. *'Nowadays I don't need all this stuff any more. I don't need my Tablas and African drums, I am not from Africa or from India. I am from Zaandam and when I was young I only had a Verkade (Dutch cookies) can and that's what I played on.'*



*Han Bennink, solo snare drum, Bimhuis 2007*

# Analysis

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## #1: Sound Concept

If you look at the six different records that I chose to analyse you can see a very clear line in Han Bennink's development if you look at sound, tuning and instrumentation. He has a clear sound concept. He knows how he wants to sound; he knows which sound he should produce when. He doesn't necessarily want to sound the same all the time. He likes to experiment and is always searching for new sounds.

As I mentioned in the opening paragraph in the small description of this topic: there are drummers who always want to sound the same. They have a basic sound; tuning, skins, sticks, cymbals, etc. That's what they use and they produce the same sound on every instrument they play on. Han Bennink doesn't work in this way. I made a small list below where you can see the instrumentation and tuning on the six different albums:

Albums:	Tuning Drums:	Instrumentation:
Mengleberg/Noordijk Quartet <i>Journey</i> , 1966	High	Drum set, cymbals, little bells, durbuka
The new Acoustic Swing Duo <i>ICP 001</i> , 1967	Low	Drum set, cymbals, pieces of metal, tablas
Brötzmann, Bennink, van Hoven <i>FMP130</i> , 1973	Low	Drum set (prepared), cymbals, small cymbals, didgeridoo, voice, xylophone, pots and pans, tables, the ground, pieces of metal, timpani, bells, big chimes, clarinet, funnel connect to a hose, woodblocks, musical saw
Han Bennink <i>Tempo Comodo</i> , 1982	Low	Little stones, stones rubbing against each other and being slammed against each other, a tube sweeping to the air, recorder, little flute, bass drum, snare drum, timpani, timbales, tables, woodblocks, pots and pans, sticks on the ground (be played or just thrown), body claps and humming, different kind of cymbals; small, big chimes, normal ones, on the drums, thrown to the ground, woodblocks, harmonica, trombone.

Trio Clusone <i>An Hour with...</i> , 2000	Higher	Drum set, cowbells, cymbals, little flute, the ground, his shoes
Han Bennink Trio <i>Bennink &amp; Co</i> , 2012	High	Snare drum, the ground, a piece of fabric

Han Bennink changes his line up and tuning. This is really clear if you listen to the Mengelberg record *Journey (1966)* compared to the ICP record with Breuker one year later. The tuning on the Mengelberg record is high because he is playing there in the bebop context.

On the duo album with Breuker he tunes the snare and the toms lower because there is no double bass to interfere with. The drums sound more natural when they are tuned low and form a bigger contrast with the high alto sax. They also mix better with the bass clarinet. He uses the same tuning for the record with Brötzmann and van Hoven because it doesn't have a real bass instrument. Although tenor sax and piano can go low the drums will sound better tuned low in this combination as well.

Later on, when he played with the Clusone Trio the tuning went up again to make room for the low notes of the cello and the repertoire is more jazz based so the drum sound asks again for more of a bebop approach. Finally, when Han plays only the snare the tuning is pretty high. That's because he tries to go back to the basics, back to his roots: jazz, high tuning.

If we look at the instrumentation we can see his quest for different sounds. The instrumentation grows exponentially in the time period between *ICP 001*, 1967 and *FMP130* 6 years later.

### Example 1

If we listen to the track: *Nr. 9* on *FMP130* we can hear a clear example of the wide sound spectrum that Han has developed in this period.

The song starts with a cluster of different sounds. Falling drumsticks on a table, some hits from a wooden stick on a bucket placed upside-down and drumstick falling down on a xylophone. This sound smoothly turns into a random counter point melody on the xylophone. Then there is a small breath of silence followed by a long single note roll moving down and up on the xylophone hitting the table and some cans on the way. The roll continues, starting high on the xylophone moving down going into wide collage of small sounds. The roll hits cans, lids of pans, the side of the table and some bottles and then moves up again on the xylophone coming to an end halfway. Some random hits follow on the bucket, xylophone, piece of metal and a small cymbal. Then we hear one last short roll down from a piece of iron on to the xylophone into some slower hits on the table, pieces of wood, bucket and ending with a last single hit on the xylophone.

*(Listen to sound file: Nr. 9)*

The sound spectrum grows until Tempo Comodo in 1982. After this the instrumentation becomes more sparse but the wide sound spectrum stays there. Han only goes deeper into one instrument.

### Example 2

On *Bennink & Co* from (2012) we hear a wide sound spectrum. He uses various techniques to accomplish that. Here are a few of them in a list:

- Sticks on the snare (snares on and off)
- Brushes on the snare (snares on and off)
- One brush and one stick
- He gets a bass drum sound by stamping his feet on the ground
- He uses a towel to muffle the snare sound (hitting it with sticks or brushes)
- He uses different kind of rim shots (on the side, with skin, stick on stick)
- He throws his sticks on the ground
- He plays on the ground with sticks
- He changes the pitch by pressing his foot on the skin of the snare
- He rubs his stick over a piece of fabric to get a kind of scrapping sound

If we look at *Klein gebrek geen Bezwaar* we can hear some of these techniques. In the beginning he is only playing pattern in 3/4 on rim and the side of the snare drum with both sticks. His feet stamping on the floor accompany this. Then he moves with the sticks more to the skin and stomps his feet and puts the snares to the skin. He changes the rhythm more into a 4/4-time feel and then goes back to rims again but keeps the same rhythm in one hand, adding little accents on the snare with the other. He ends the intro by throwing one stick to the ground.

He then comes in again with a hit on the snare followed by a fill on rims and feet on the ground into playing time on the rim of the snare for a while. After this he changes to time with the brushes with the snares on, moving slowly to play time with the snares of the skin.

Towards the ending when the music goes up in intensity he moves back to sticks playing kind of timbales rimshots and more wild accents on the rims with the snares still off. When the music becomes quieter and moves back into 4/4 swing, he starts to play time again on the rims. Towards the end he moves to one stick and one brush. Swiping the brush with one hand and playing a famous swing pattern using two sounds; the open snare sound and the rimclick.

*(Listen to sound file: Klein gebrek geen Bezwaar)*

## #2: Energy

Han has a lot of energy. In his biography we read that this comes from his mother. Because his grandfather (from his mother's side) was Dutch champion Judo and almost went to the Olympic Games when he was young. He already had this crazy energy and Han got it from him.

When we see Han play we can experience it very well. As he recalls in documentary *De Bezetene* (the possessed) from 1969: 'if I make music there is nothing else there. I am always going for it 100%, I can't do it differently'.

Energy in music is very important, so if a person can bring that in then that's a very valuable thing. Energy brings the music to a higher level; it gives the music that little bit extra that makes it exciting to listen to. Music that has been played very well, technically on a high level, can still be very boring to listen to if it doesn't have enough energy.

### Example 1

The first example is from the Clusone Trio record *An Hour with...* from the year 2000. If you listen to *Medley 5 - Le cygne; A Velho Pedro; Marie Pompoen* from minute 2.36 Michael is playing the head of *A Velho Pedro* together with Han. Ernst joins in after the first round of melody coming in on the hits in the melody after the B section, changing the colour and giving the music more groove by picking the chords. Michael continues playing the melody in the second head and Han changes to a groove on the hihat. After this round Michael starts to solo on the form. In the B section Han moves the groove from the hihat to the snare drum playing some press rolls. After the B section the whole band plays the hits of the head and Han screams out loud hitting the first beat after the hits and starts to groove extra hard on the hihat. The next round of Michael's solo is really cooking and Han is screaming and yelling at Michael. Han plays a groove with the bass drum on 1 and 3 and a 16<sup>th</sup> note pattern in his hands on the hihat with a snare drum on the 4<sup>th</sup> beat every two bars. This is a very simple basic groove but the energy is enormous, that's why it grooves really nice. This example shows the energy that Han brings to the music and how it makes the music very exciting to listen to.

*(Listen to sound file: Medley 5 - Le cygne; A Velho Pedro; Marie Pompoen,)*

### Example 2

If we listen to *Mr M.A. de R. in A. on ICP 001*, (1968) -the duo recording of Han and Willem Breuker- we hear another clear example of this endless energy. The tune takes 3,20 minutes and is played fortissimo for the first one and a half minutes. It starts with a swelling cymbal roll going into a thundering jungle like groove on the toms. He is already playing very loud but gets even louder trying to overplay the saxophone when it comes in after 7 seconds. The roaring drums and screaming saxophone go together up to 30 seconds and then Han leaves a pause leaving the saxophone alone for 4 seconds. After that he comes in again with new thundering drums in a new attempt to take out the sax, this goes on until 1,25 min.

*(Listen to sound file :Mr M.A. de R. in A.)*

This example clearly shows the amount of energy that Han Bennink puts into his playing. The music is played so rough that you almost want to turn it off. He is literally bashing the drums and coming in stronger after every pause. He produces a babbling,



noisy, trashy sound, by playing a continuous stream of loud and fast notes. You can only play these kind of phrases if you have this kind of energy and you need to have the physical power to play it.

### #3: Theatre Elements

John: I want to ask some general questions about your philosophy and approach to use of humor in music.

*Han: 'When I do something and the others in the Clusone Trio are just going on, that makes a real strange tension. I can work with that. I do it to make room in the music, and I do it for myself, because I actually come from that art school. It's not only the musical input, you can do more. Like Claes Oldenberg did, for example. You can play with an enormous drumstick, two very long ones, but really try to play with them, not only show them. What I often do is play very fast, break a stick, grab another stick-and I know what I'm doing-, I grab a big Aboriginal stick, hold it, you see the difference, and I throw it away. That might be very funny, but it's just to let them see the difference.'*<sup>3</sup>

*(Interview Han Bennink, Vancouver 1993)*

John Corbett, me and everybody else who has seen Han Bennink play knows that there is always this moment where he is going to do something funny. Something weird that most of the musicians nowadays don't do. Han Bennink could just stand up and scream or takes his sticks and play on the wall or the furniture.

I think the use of these other elements; visual elements and theatre elements, are very present in the way that Han Bennink makes music. They are so present that sometimes critics dislike it because it takes the listener away from the music. Even fellow musicians don't want to play with him anymore because they think that he doesn't take them or the music seriously.

Han Bennink's playing is all about contrast. It always has been about searching for conflict. He likes it when there is a little friction because this sparks his creativity. *'If its too smooth I don't believe it anymore'*. I believe, and that's also something that he says in the above excerpt, that he uses this techniques on purpose to create friction. He also uses it to express himself more clearly.

Most of the examples below will not be from the six records mentioned in the method. These elements are visual or theatre elements and we can't hear this on the records. Therefore, I looked for video material and written examples of people who saw him play.

#### Example 1

The first example is a video fragment of Han Bennink playing with Peter Brötzmann and Fred van Hoven on February 4, 1974 at the Norddeutscher Rundfunk Jazzworkshop held at the NDR Funkhaus in Hannover, Germany. The group performs Hans Eisler's Einheitslied.

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpt from: *Extended Play* by John Corbett

Towards the ending around 3.27 when Peter starts to play the melody to end the tune Han Bennink takes away a piece of his drum set, his African snare drum, and starts to walk to the back of the stage while he still playing on it with one hand. Van Hoven reacts to him and begins to play long glissandos from high to low while Brötzmann is still playing the melody. There is something like a wooden wall with a rippled surface, the same as on a guiro (a shaker which you scratch with a small stick). Han Bennink plays on the wall and the snare but when van Hoven's low glissando meets up with Brötzmann's final note of the melody he starts to run along the wall scraping the stick over the surface. He is trying to imitate Van Hovens glissando's.

Out of his version of the glissando Brötzmann starts to play the melody one last time. Han Bennink picks that up and comes back to the snare and accompanies him in time. Then they hit the last note together and Han Bennink plays a role on the snare going into a ritard.

Brötzmann plays the last four bars out of time while Han runs a last time along the wall ending up at a door. Han plays a very soft role on a small piece of the wall next to the door before Brötzmann hits the root of the melody finished by van Hove playing a really low drone on the piano. Han Bennink closes Van Hoven's last note by scraping with his stick along the wall and when the audience starts to applause he opens the door and walks offstage.

*(listen to sound file : Einheitslied, 1974)*

*(link to the video on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQ7zHI-HLSU>)*

### Example 2

The next example shows Han's use of theatre and humour to make a strong statement. *'Once, when you played in Providence, Rhode Island, you did something incredible. You put your foot on the snare drum like you do sometimes do, to change its pitch, put your foot on the snare again, someone laughed, and you stopped cold, marched angrily out of the theatre, and came back in dragging a huge cardboard foot, which you'd obviously seen earlier backstage.'*<sup>4</sup>

In this example you can see clearly how strong these elements can work. He knows from other shows that if he puts his foot on the snare that somebody in the audience may start laughing, that has happened before. He saw the cardboard foot before he went on stage, because he is always very early on all his concerts just to check the place and feel the acoustics.

When the person started to laugh he stopped playing. This creates a big contrast and tension. What is he going to do? Is he going to stop? He marches angrily off stage leaving the audience in doubt and kind of ashamed because they offended him. Then he comes back with the big cardboard foot creating a big relief from the tension that was there before. The cardboard foot connects to the image of the listener, that's why he/she had to laugh in the first place, because it looked funny when he puts his foot on the snare. The cardboard foot became part of the music because Han stopped playing when he put his foot on the snare.

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<sup>4</sup> Source: *Extended play*, by John Corbett

So even if he is performing a solo concert and there is no fellow musician to interfere with, he's trying to find somebody or some ways to create a tension, a parallel movement, so his own voice will be stronger. In this example he tricks the audience in being his partner.

#### #4: Tradition

Han grew up with a father playing as a percussionist and reed player in radio orchestras and small combos. The pop music of this era (50's and 60's) was based on the American songbook and musical songs: the jazz standard repertoire. They lived near the radio broadcasting and television studios in Hilversum. Han could sing the whole American songbook by the age of 15.

Han's youth was filled with music. Due to his father being such a proficient musician, it's not strange that Han ended up playing drums and his brother Peter, the saxophone. Because his father worked at the radio and on the television, American stars would sometimes come down to Hilversum and play with the orchestra.

Han was a big fan of American drummers. When we read from his diary in this period we can find 'crazy about Roy (Roy Haynes)', 'Elvin is amazing (Elvin Jones)', etc. But his all time favourite is Kenny Clark. Kenny Clark is a typical bebop drummer. He was one of the inventors of the cymbal beat, he moves the 'time' beat from the hihat to the cymbal. The cymbal beat the typical ting-ting-ga-ting was played by the right hand on the cymbal with the hihat on 2 and 4. The soloists were accompanied by the snare drum with the right hand and the so-called 'bombs' with played with the bass drum.

Drummers from this era came from the marching bands and they worked with rudiments: basic strokes, ruffs and roles, which you played on the snare drum. When you hear drummers from the bop era, they play solos using the snare drum as a starting point for there phrases and then move around the kit but still using these rudimental strokes and techniques.

Han Bennink was a total fan and tried to sound as an American drummer. The most important thing was that you should swing because 'it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing'. He knew all the American jazz cats and at the school they made lists and combinations of their favourite rhythm section players.

#### Example 1

The first example is a solo that I transcribed from the Misha Mengelberg/Piet Noordijk record from 1966. It's Han Bennink's solo on a Mengelberg composition called *Driekusman Total Loss*. The song is a simple AABA structured song with 8 bars in every section, like any other jazz standard from that time. The bass plays in two and later during the solos in four. Han Bennink plays American cymbal time and accompanies the soloists with the snare drum and the bass drum like Kenny Clark. Even his swing beat on the cymbal is kind of similar to Kenny Clark's beat. His eighth notes on the cymbal are really straight and not so much triplets like Elvin Jones.

The drum solo starts after the bass solo and is separated in two parts. In the first part he plays most of the phrases in time but he leaves pauses in between so it gets a more rubato feeling of loose time. This is something that was not very common at this time; although you can hear Elvin Jones doing it on John Coltrane's *Love Supreme* (1965).

The second part is in time. Han Bennink plays two phrases of 8 bars and quotes the melody very clear in the last two bars. Then Mengelberg starts to comp him with chords on the piano. Han plays three more phrases of 8 bars and finishes with a clear quote of the last four bars of the melody before the band hits the head out.

All the phrases you can see in the example below (**figure 1a**), in both parts, are all starting from the snare drum. This is typical bebop drumming. Most of the phrases are starting from the snare or are played on only the snare drum. This comes from the marching band tradition because all these drummers used to play only snare drum the whole time.

Another thing, which is really clear, is the use of rudimental drumming. The second and third phrases are built out of five stroke rolls. These rolls are played as: RR-LL-R (R is the right hand and L is the left hand)(yellow squares). He starts them on the snare drum and finishes them alternating between the floor tom and the snare drum. This is a rudimental stroke that you can find in most of the marching band or snare drum etudes. You can find more marching drumming elements; he uses a ruff in third phrase, longer rolls (seven stroke) and a six-stroke roll (paradiddle-diddle, R-LL-RR-L) on the floor tom in the fourth phrase.

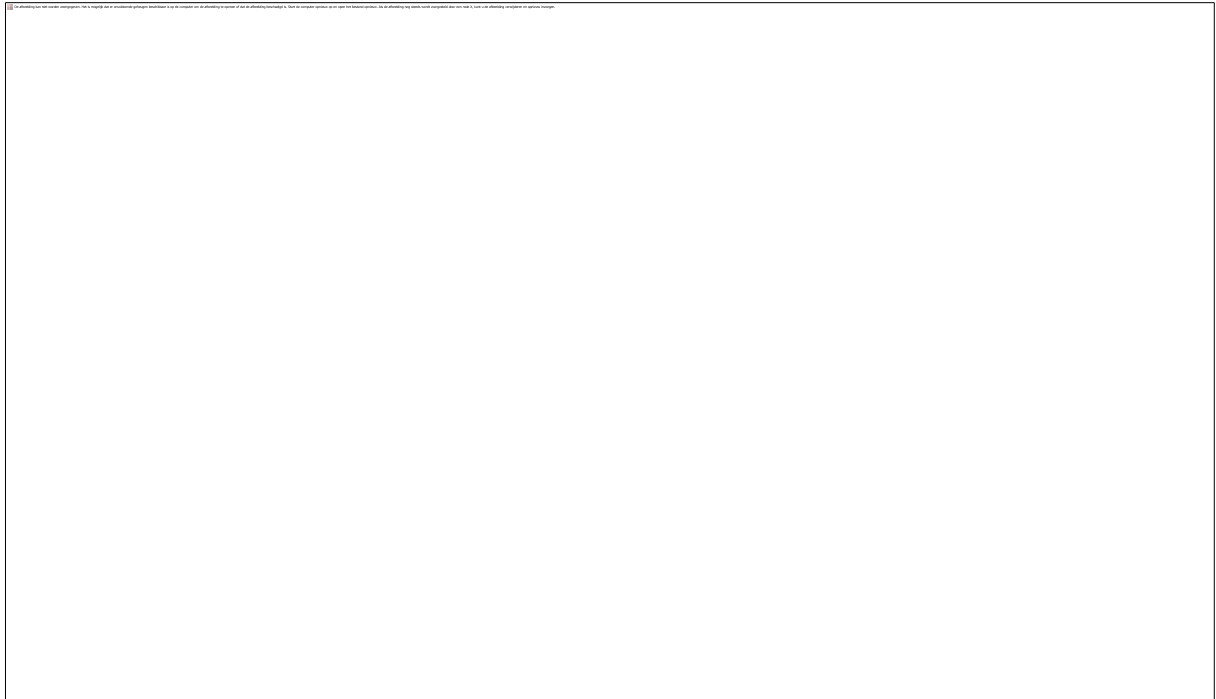


**figure 1a**

### Example 2

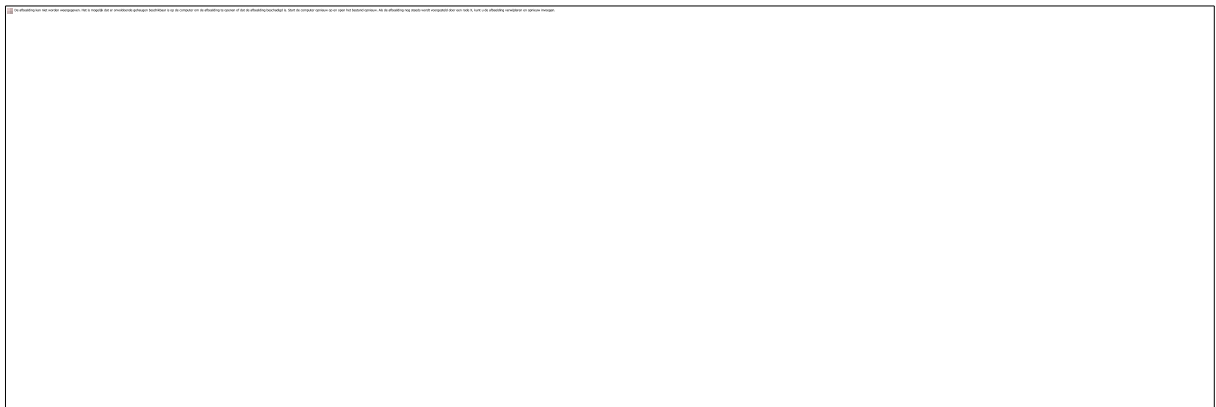
The second example (**figure 1b**) is a small bit that I transcribed from the solo record *Tempo Comodo*, 1982. This song is called *Traps 3* and is a piece where we hear Han Bennink play a combination of drums set, timbales and bells. We are almost 20 years further in time but this example shows that he is using the same material (strokes, phrases) from the bebop tradition but moves them to a different instrumentation.

The part below is starting from 3.56 min. He starts off with a phrase that sounds pretty free and loose but if you look at it closer you can hear that he is just playing on a 4/4 fast time pulse. Especially the second part of the first phrases, after the choked cymbal when the cymbal pattern comes in, it's really clear that he is thinking of a really fast jazz pulse. You can almost feel the after beat on 2 and 4. This whole piece is played very fast, but the phrases from 1966 are still there. The shape and placements of the accents are still the same.



**figure 1b**

After that we hear a clear rudimental motif between the high timbales and the snare drum (**figure 1c**). It's the six-stroke role again (para-diddle diddle R-L-RR-LL), but now with the accent on the high timbales and he finishes the phrase with a rudimental flam on the snare.



**figure 1c**

## #5: Technique

Han Bennink practiced a lot during his period in the shed in Loenen aan de Vecht in the 70's. 'This was the period where my technique really improved', he recalls in *De Wereld als Trommel*. In this period he developed a technique to play a fast single stroke role with one hand. The role comes from a sweeping motion of the hand, going from left to right (this technique is only possible if you play in traditional grip). The stick hits the skin when you move from one side to the other. He could do this pretty fast so he got a nice even sounding stream of notes. This allowed him to be free with his right hand and play phrases on top of this constant pulse of notes.

If you listen to his solo records from that period or if you hear him later in the 80's he has really fast phrases and sometimes you even get the impression that there is more than one drummer playing.

### Example 1

I made a video from a duo concert of Han Bennink together with Guus Janssen last year in the Rode Bioscoop in Amsterdam. In this video you can see a clear demonstration of this technique.

*(watch video fragment Han/Guus)*

### Example 2

If you listen to the first piece on the record *An hour with...* (1999) from the Clusone Trio you can hear a clear example of the two drummer effect. The title of the track is *Medley 1*. The magic happens right in the beginning from 0.15 min. He starts the piece with some short fast phrases on the toms and the snare in combinations with the bass drum. After that he goes into a really fast roll on the snare drum accompanied by fast 16<sup>th</sup> notes on the bass drum. Then he moves his left hand to the cymbal and starts to play the one-handed roll. During this he plays some babbling rhythms with his right hand on the snare drum.

He uses the same technique again round 3.00 min. when he plays a really fast long role on the rim of the snare drum. You can clearly hear some rolling sound in it that comes from the one-handed roll with the left hand. If he had played this same roll with single strokes (RLRL) or with doubles (RLLRRL) the sound would be different.

*(listen to sound file: Medley 1.)*

## #6: Storytelling

If you listen to Han you probably can't find a moment when you think: this guy doesn't say anything. You maybe think what he's playing is too busy; too many notes, too loud or you just don't like it at all. However, if you are thinking that he done it already; he grabbed your attention. He played something that made you listen and think, and then you jumped to the conclusion: I like it or not. Han is a master in telling little stories when he is playing the drums or percussion or whatever. There is always something that makes you listen or grabs your attention.

Down here you will find a small description on how a story is built:

*'A story is built out of three parts; these parts are connected and follow each other in time. The second part evokes the third part.*

*The first and the third part are static and the second one has an active role.*

*The third part is different from the first part. The third part contains revealed secrets or answers to questions that are presented in the first part.'*<sup>5</sup>

### Example 1

This example (**figure 2a**) is a piece that I transcribed from the *Bennink & CO* record from 2012. This piece is called *Postlude to Kiefer and Piece of Drum*. It's a drum solo and as the title already suggests an intro to the piece *Kiefer*. In the middle part of the solo we can hear a clear example of the three-part structure build up that is typical for good storytelling.

From 1,06 min. he creates a medium/fast 4/4 swing groove with his feet stamping on every quarter note and playing some hits on 2 and 4 and other accents on the snare. He introduces the first part of the story; he starts to whistle a little melody. He accompanies the melody with some small accents on the snare drum. The melody is ending on the second note of the scale leaving a question mark.

After this, the second more active part comes where he plays some repetitive phrase with some accents on the snare drum. This leads into the third and last part of the story where the whistled melody comes back but then it answers the first part and it resolves in some heavy accents on the snare drum.

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<sup>5</sup> Excerpt from: *Verhalen, Vertellen* by H. Stolk

54 Setting up the mood

59

First Part: question?

64 HAN WHISLES THIS MELODY

68 ending on the 2nd

Second Part: active

More notes more dense

72

Third part: solution, answer

77 answer to melody in the first part

ending on the 4th

more density solution to part 2

83

87

figure 2a



The diagram on page 26 in *Verhalen, Vertellen* by H. Stolk shows a graphic display of the different aspects of telling a story.

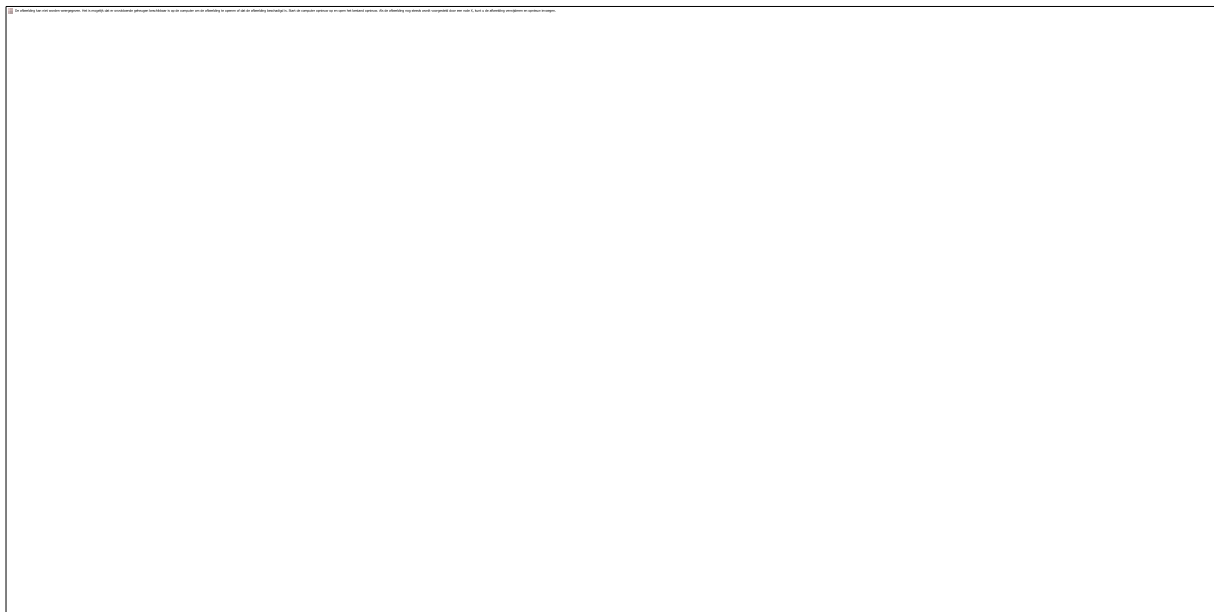
In the diagram we see on the left side: knowing the story, loving to tell the story to other people. On the right side we see what the audience has to do to be taking by the story: recognition of the story and following the events that are happening.

There are some different techniques that Han uses to create recognitions and structure in the story:

- Pauses in between phrases or silent moments
- Question and Answer
- Dynamic shapes

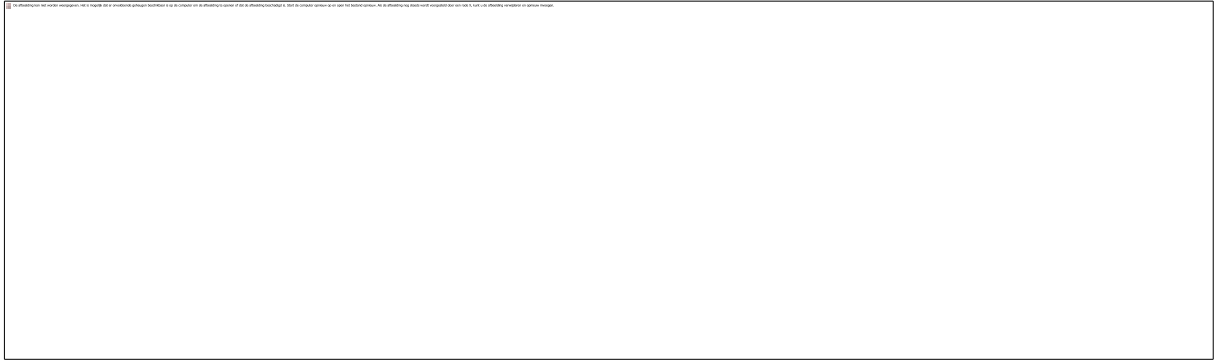
### Example 2

If we look at the solo on *Driekusman Total Loss* we can see this techniques very clearly. He uses a lot of pauses in between the phrases in the beginning like he is speaking and trying to give every phrase a lot of clarity. If you look at the red circles you can see that the ending are very similar to every phrase, he also uses a lot of the same rhythmical cells (the blue squares), both contribute to a coherent story and create a recognizable line to the ear (**figure 2b**).



**figure 2b**

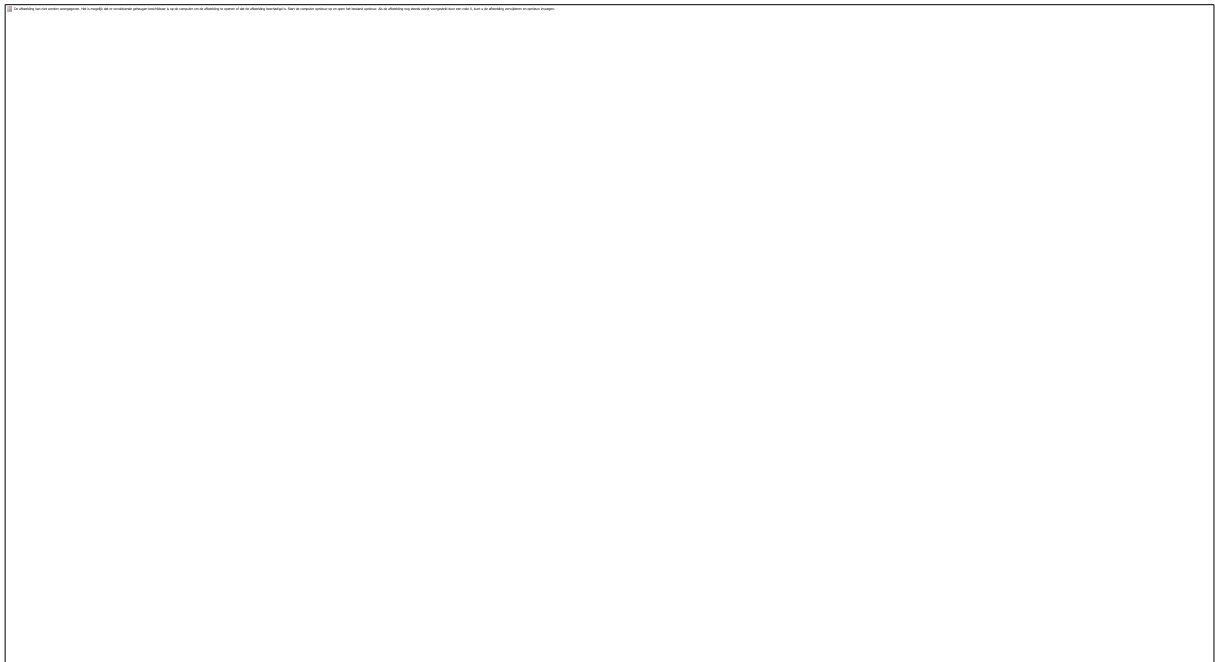
The example below (**figure 2c**) comes from the beginning of the last part. This part is played in a clear pulse. Here we have a clear question/answer figure. The orange part is the question or the theme of the whole last section if you look at the whole solo. In the second bar he repeats this figure but makes a variations with the bass drum. The third and the forth bar are the answer to the question. In the fifth bar he repeats the question and continues by giving a second longer answer witch is still related to the first answer (look at the circled notes).



**figure 2c**

The excerpt below (**figure 2d**) is a great example of Han Bennink playing a dynamic shape. The spectrum in brightness of the colour shows the dynamic shape, meaning light is soft and dark is loud.

He starts this part with a melodic phrase on the snare drum. He repeats that phrase and moves it to the high tom, going on into a wild phrase on all the drums (the dark red part). After this the density goes down by taking out different drums. First he takes out the floor tom, followed by the high tom, then the bass drum and ending on only the snare drum. Towards the end of the excerpt the pauses in between the phrases get longer that give the feeling of the end of the story.



**figure 2d**

## #7: Fluxus

To address this last point I first need to tell you a little bit about what Fluxus actually is. I will give you a small description on the history and the key elements of this movement.

*'Art (What's It Good For)?' This was the question concerned to George Muciunas. He devoted his life to the analysis of what art has been throughout the history of humankind and what it might be good for now. Muciunas regarded art at its best to be part of the social process, as it had been from prehistoric times to the Renaissance. During our modern era, art became something with a unique aura, something to be evaluated by the specialists and collected by galleries. After World War II, Maciunas and his fellow Fluxus artist took up the work of re-embedding art within life-as-it-is-lived begun by Dada and Russian Constructivist artists following World War I.*<sup>6</sup>

### Introduction Fluxus<sup>7</sup>

'Fluxus' was a movement started by George Maciunas in July 1961 in New York. He was working at that time at the AG Gallery in New York. He was producing events at the Gallery called *Musica Antiqua et Nova*. On these events he met people like La Monte Young and Yoko Ono. Yoko Ono was doing mostly conceptual and participatory paintings by that time. Visitors to the show were invited to take part in the realization or completion of the pieces. *Smoke Painting*, for example, could be burned with a cigarette or match by the visitor who could then watch the smoke rise and see the canvas burn.

Inspired by the exhibitions and works of his friends, George wanted to label this way of making art and exhibitions. He came up with the word Fluxus, dictionary definition: *a continuous moving on or passing, as of a flowing changing stream*. Fluxus should be the new stream that would give art back to people. Art should be as simple as life.

At first George wanted to make a magazine to promote the movement. He planned to release six issues at the end of 1961. By January 1962 it changed into seven 'yearbooks' containing the work of several artists. In the end **Fluxus 1** was not finished until 1964. The **Fluxus Year Box 2** (a box containing new, unpublished works by the most radical artists from many different countries) appeared in 1966 and **Fluxpack 3** in 1975.

The movement also started to become known in Europe by that time. In 1961, Maciunas started also to connect with artists from Europe that had the same approach to music and art and should provide material for the Fluxus yearbooks and boxes. People like Daniel Spoerri and Ben Vautier. By the end of 1962 Maciunas produced one-day Fluxus events in Wuppertal, Düsseldorf and Paris. On these events you could find music, visual art, poetry, literature and theatre.

Maciunas started to make Flux Boxes, the Fluxus newspaper and Fluxkit's. All these things would contain works made by Fluxus artist from all over the world. These boxes and newspapers would be sold at Fluxus events, prices in-between \$1 to \$20. You could also order them or buy them at the Fluxshops. By 1965 there were five official shops: two in New York, one in Amsterdam, Paris and Tokyo.

By the end of 1968 Maciunas had expanded the idea of Fluxus objects in many directions, enlarging the scope of a Fluxus work to include environments, meals, game

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from: *Fluxus And The Essential Questions Of Life*, by Jacquelynn Baas

<sup>7</sup> *Fluxus And The Essential Questions Of Life*, by Jacquelynn Baas, *Uncovering Fluxus –Recovering Fluxus*, by Jon Hendricks

centres, vending machines, arcades, furniture, sound machines, etc., always requesting suggestions and ideas from artists associated with the Fluxus movement. Examples of Fluxus games by 1974 were *prepared ping pong* and *floor billiard with paper boxes*. George Maciunas was a complex genius, driven by a utopian vision of a new art and a new society. He saw Fluxus as both an amusement and a device to undermine the preciousness of art. He valued functionalism, but never indulged in futility. Perhaps his intentions for Fluxus and Fluxus products can best be summarized by the 1965 manifesto, where he compares 'art' to 'Fluxus Art-Amusement':

*ART*

*To justify artist's professional, parasitic and elite status in society  
He must demonstrate artist's indispensability and exclusiveness,  
He must demonstrate the dependability of audience upon him,  
He must demonstrate that no one but the artist can do art.*

*FLUXUS ART-AMUSEMENT*

*To establish artist's non professional status in society,  
He must demonstrate artist's dispensability and inclusiveness,  
He must demonstrate the self-sufficiency of the audience,  
He must demonstrate that anything can be art and anyone can do it.*

8

In my interview I asked Han if he was a Fluxus artist and he replied: *'I was too young for that shit. I was still in art school making little drawings when it was happening'*. But I think that because he played with Misha and Brötzmann he was very influenced by it.

Misha Mengelberg and Peter Brötzmann were two musicians who were very inspired by Fluxus in this time period from 1960 to 1980. Misha worked later around the end of 1980 together with Wim T. Schippers and made music theatre based on these concepts. Peter Brötzmann was a saxophone player as well as a painter and visual artist that made Fluxus paintings and art.

Han played together with Misha over 40 years. They started in the quartet with Piet Noordijk, then the duo, later music theatre with Wim T. Schippers and then ICP Orchestra. Han worked from late 1960 till 1980 together with Peter Brötzmann, first in a trio with Fred van Hove and later on as a duo. They played on various Fluxus events in Holland and Germany.

If we take a look at the things that were happening at a Fluxus event in the 60's: theatre, music, speeches and visual art, we can see all these elements emerge in Han's playing. He uses theatre elements, vaudeville theatre jokes, sometimes he screams or starts to tell an anecdote about his life and he is a visual artist himself.

In an interview with Vera Vingerhoeds in the Bimhuis, when Han Bennink was playing there for the 50 years anniversary of the ICP orchestra, Vera asks him about his opinion on improvising: *'Improvising is like walking on the street going to work, you don't take the same route every day because that's boring, or maybe there is a roadblock and you have to*

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<sup>8</sup> Excerpt from: *Uncovering Fluxus – Recovering Fluxus*, by Jon Hendricks.

*take another route, in fact everybody is an improviser because everybody does that every day.'*

Is this example he clearly states that improvising, something he is doing as an art, is something that everybody does. This falls clearly together with the last phrase of George Maciunas take on Art vs. Fluxus-Art-Amusement.

*(listen to sound file : Vera Vingerhoeds interviewd Misha Mengelberg)*

*(link to the video on youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0tnWZQ0-IE>)*

If we take a look at the period where Han Bennink was doing his sound research, end of the 60's through late 70's; he is playing on everything; every little thing that could produce a sound. This was also the booming period of the Fluxus in Europe. The Fluxus said that everything could be art; daily life was more interesting then art. Han went into sound. Everything could make a sound, music is made out of sound and so everything can be used to make music.

We can also see a small connection between Yoko Ono's participatory paintings and Han's way of trying to involve the audience in his show. Han is trying to make music but also trying to perform for the audience. He wants to take them away, talk to them and interact with them. In the same way Yoko Ono's paintings interact with the people how came to look at them.

# Epilogue

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## What did I learn from this?

You are growing up and becoming an individual in society. But what is your identity in this society? Who are you? What defines you? What's your personality?

These are general questions that you could ask yourself in any profession but I think these questions are very important when you are trying to make any form of art. Art is very personal and it should be personal, because that is what's great about art: different styles, different personalities, different opinions, etc. But these differences are stronger if you have strong personalities, people that know what they want to do and now who they are.

I can see very clearly that Han Bennink was also looking for answers to these questions. First he did what everybody did, the jazz thing, but later on he changed and started to do what he really believed in despite of what other people thought. He experimented a lot in the 70's and 80's but I have the feeling that when you see him play nowadays he is really at ease. He did everything and now he strongly believes in only playing the snare drum at a concert.

I am still searching for my own personality. Who am I on the drums? What do I want to sound like? As we can see if we look at Han Bennink this can take some time, but the important thing is that you should start right away with asking yourself these questions. I am trying to find sounds in the drums that I like and I could use so that I have my own personality on the drums. My ultimate goal is that people will start to recognise me if they hear me play several times.

If you listen to Han Bennink a lot you will start to realize that he plays with the time feel. He likes to play rubato (out of time phrases) combined with time playing (phrases in a defined pulse). I like that very much and I am trying to incorporate this into my own playing or into my compositions.

The differences between these two things to me feel like the tension between the tonic function and the dominant function if you look at harmony. The rubato feeling is a feeling of constant movement; this feeling wants to resolve to the pulse feeling, like the dominant wants to resolve to the tonic.

The last thing that I would like to mention goes for every musician, not only me specifically. Han Bennink has theatre elements in his playing. He wants to communicate with the audience not only on the musical level but also on the physical or visual level. I think this is a really strong point that musicians should enhance when they are on stage. Don't go over the top by running around in bunny suit on stage, but try to give the people also some visual attention. I think that this could make the story that you are trying to tell stronger.

Think of a dress code for your band, what are you going to say to the people in the breaks in between the songs, show that you are having fun (or whatever the music is about), try to see if you can find some visual aspects in your music that you could communicate to the audience. Often you see a band (especially jazz bands) that don't

think or care about this aspect. The audience wants to be entertained. That is the original purpose of music.

I think this study on Han Bennink made me a better musician and a better composer. I know more about the Dutch jazz roots and how the Dutch musicians became famous during the last 50 years for their free improvised music; The New Dutch Swing. I learned about free improvisation, a style in jazz that musicians nowadays don't play anymore because they think it's easy because you can play whatever you want. I am not suggesting that free improvised music is the best thing to do, but you should study it a bit or at least listen to it if you want to play jazz music.

## Discography

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- Misha Mengleberg/Piet Noordijk Quartet *Journey*, 1966
- The new Acoustic Swing Duo *ICP 001*, 1967
- Brötzmann, Bennink, van Hoven *FMP130*, 1973
- Han Bennink *Nerve Beats*, 1973
- Han Bennink & Peter Brotzmann *Schwarzwaldfahrt*, 1977
- Han Bennink *Tempo Comodo*, 1982
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### **Movies:**

- *De Bezetene*, documentary about Han Bennink, 1969
- *Live Concert*, Han Bennink & Guus Janssen, Rode Bioscoop Amsterdam, 2012
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